Text: Less industrialized economies should prioritize environmental protection over resource extraction when the two conflict.

“Developing countries” promotes Western imperialism which kills the environment, turns case.

**Berger 12** writes[[1]](#footnote-1)

In a speech at the Congress of Black African Writers in 1959, Frantz Fanon remarked: “Colonial domination… very soon manages to disrupt in spectacular fashion the cultural life of a conquered people… [T]he intellectual throws himself in frenzied fashion into the frantic acquisition of the culture of the occupying power and takes every opportunity of unfavourably criticising his own national culture.” This statement contains the essence of the less-recent history of colonized countries, but, more importantly, it presages current trends—driven by the forces of cultural colonialism—**in what we** now **term “developing” countries** such as India. Indeed, **the remnants of imperialism** now **manifest** in the dangerous and powerful discourse of development. Many contemporary scholars of anthropology argue that the use of the language of “development” in a post-colonial world has negatively affected non-Western countries—and exacerbated residual problems associated with colonialism—**by leading indigenous people to view themselves as** “underdeveloped” or “undeveloped,” that is, **inferior to** the **“developed” Westerners**. This perceived inequality is entrenched not only by international (Western) NGOs and Western governments, but it is also planted, reinforced, and spread by the very citizens and governments who are supposedly being “developed” by the first world. The discourse of development inextricably links what is seemingly positive, **“development,”** which **connotes progress**, growth, and advancement, **with** the **ideals** and lifestyles **of the West**. This language also, therefore, associates non-Western cultures, ideas, values, religions, and occupations with backwardness and stagnation: the antitheses of progress. It stigmatizes the poor and further empowers the rich. In pursuit of the idealized materialistic Western lifestyle, **non-Western countries** have experienced (**despite** their **growing GDPs, a Western-defined measurement of wealth**) [have **experience**d] more debilitating **poverty and** an ever-**widening distance between the rich and** the **poor**. Whereas pre-colonial India had a more symbiotic, less destructive relationship with the environment, the values underlying this coexistence have, in many ways, been replaced with a Western culture which exploits resources and the earth and prioritizes material wealth. Nowhere has the discourse of development had such a profound impact as in India. Despite the country’s enormous economic growth over the last two decades and its emergence as a global economic force, much of its population still faces and will continue to grapple with immense social challenges, all of which are rooted in inequality: malnutrition, poverty, lack of adequate shelter and sanitation, and disease. According to the World Health Organization, less than a third of India’s population has sustainable access to improved sanitation. The World Bank asserts that almost half of all girls and 45% of boys in India are underweight, and many more are deficient in at least one essential micronutrient. Perhaps the most telling figure is that the number of people living in slums in India has doubled in the past two decades, and continues to rise steadily. We align economic development with prosperity and progress for all, but can we say that life has really improved for India’s most disadvantaged? Along with its poorest and most marginalized people, India’s environment has also suffered as its economic growth outpaces its ability—and perhaps desire—to protect its air, water, land, biodiversity, and other natural resources. **The Western notion of development**, which many Indians have readily embraced, **emphasizes** distance rather than closeness to nature, as well as **unrestrained exploitation of resources**. Foreign aid, the medium of expression for the discourse of development, perpetuates domination of nature in the name of “progress.” Certainly, pre-colonial and pre-development India was no utopia. A rigid caste system and draconian governmental regimes firmly anchored poverty, hunger, and inequality in the culture. One could not reasonably argue that India should or could be returned to its pre-colonial state, or that all development efforts there should be halted or reversed. It is true that development has and will continue to improve the lives of millions of people in India, by providing jobs, income, infrastructure, and improved healthcare for many over the course of this century. Yet it has undoubtedly deepened existing inequality, and, while it has allowed India to enjoy short-term economic success, it has arguably positioned the country for long-term difficulties. Development has bred dependence on foreign aid while weakening self-sufficiency and the prospect of future sustainability. In the 21st century, India will continue to feel immense growing pains and will place considerable strain on the world’s resources.

Imperialism risks extinction. **Eckhardt 90** writes[[2]](#footnote-2)

Modern **Western Civilization used war** as well as peace to gain the whole world as a domain **to benefit itself at the expense of others**: The expansion of the culture and institutions of modern civilization from its centers in Europe was made possible by imperialistic war… It is true missionaries and traders had their share in the work of expanding world civilization, but always with the support, immediate or in the background, of armies and navies (pp. 251-252). The importance of dominance as a primary motive in civilized war in general was also emphasized for modern war in particular: '[Dominance] is probably the most important single element in the causation of major modern wars' (p. 85). European empires were thrown up all over the world in this processof benefiting some at the expense of others, which was characterized by armed violence contributing to structural violence: 'World-empire is built by conquest and maintained by force… Empires are primarily organizations of violence' (pp. 965, 969). 'The struggle for **empire has** greatly increased the disparity between states with respect to the political control of resources, since there can never be enough imperial territory to provide for all' (p. 1190). This 'disparity between states', not to mention the disparity within states, both of which take the form of racial differences in life expectancies, has **killed** 15-**20 times as many people** in the 20th century **as** have **wars and revolutions** (Eckhardt & Kohler, 1980; Eckhardt, 1983c). When this structural violence of 'disparity between states' created by civilization is taken into account, then the violent nature of civilization becomes much more apparent. Wright concluded that 'Probably at least 10 per cent of deaths in modern civilization can be attributed directly or indirectly to war… The trend of war has been toward greater cost, both absolutely and relative to population… The proportion of the population dying as a direct consequence of battle has tended to increase' (pp. 246, 247). So far as structural violence has constituted about one-third of all deaths in the 20th century (Eckhardt & Kohler, 1980; Eckhardt, 1983c), and so far as structural violence was a function of armed violence, past and present, then Wright's estimate was very conservative indeed. Assuming that war is some function of civilization, then civilization is responsible for one-third of 20th century deaths. This is surely self-destruction carried to a high level of efficiency. The structural situation has been improving throughout the 20th century, however, so that structural violence caused 'only' 20% of all deaths in 1980 (Eckhardt, 1983c). There is obviously room for more improvement. To be sure, armed violence in the form of revolution has been directed toward the reduction of structural violence, even as armed violence in the form of imperialism has been directed toward its maintenance. But imperial violence came first, in the sense of creating structural violence, before revolutionary violence emerged to reduce it. It is in this sense that **structural violence was** basically, fundamentally, and primarily **a function of armed violence** in its imperial form. **The atomic age has ushered in the possibility**, and some would say the probability, of killing not only some of us for the benefit of others, nor even of killing all of us to no one's benefit, but **of putting an end to life itself!** This is surely carrying self-destruction to some infinite power beyond all human comprehension. It's too much, or superfluous, as the Existentialists might say. Why we should care is a mystery. But, if we do, then the need for civilized peoples to respond to the ethical challenge is very urgent indeed. Life itself may depend upon our choice.

“Less industrialized economies” solves Western imperial bias.

**Donaldson 8** writes[[3]](#footnote-3)

**I’m not a fan of** using **the word “de­veloping”** to describe people**. What makes a society developed? Wealth? Mass consumerism?** Stability? **Equality?** There are several projects that attempt to measure happiness—and few cor­relate it with gross domestic product or per capita income. And **“developing country” seems like a** summation of two **misnomer**s **considering that the borders of most post-colonial countries are European map carvings with mini­mal thought to the local people.** With my work, I tend to stick with **“less in­dustrialized economies**.**”** It’s not a great label and produces a terrible acronym, but it **is scalable and gets away from** the **more subjective issues of development**. That said, I still refer to design aimed at promoting social well-being and help­ing people meet their basic needs as “design for development.”

Discourse comes first. It shapes environmental policy.

**Meisner 95** writes[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Language is a central part of how humans view** and act in the world. It is both a tool we use and a place where we live. Through the study of language we can learn about ourselves, and in this case, specifically about our relationships to **the non-human world**. So it is not that I think language is the problem that needs fixing. I prefer to think of it (with apologies to Susan Sontag (1978) and an awareness of the problems with the metaphor) as a sort of contagious symptom of an underlying disease. Treating language will not make the anthropocentric-resourcist ideology and its behavioural, economic and structural manifestations go away. But language is a sign of something wrong and it is a way to get the people concerned to think about the issues. By “language” I simply mean words and ways of arranging them. I therefore distinguish between what people mean to say (propositional content), and how they say it (lexical and syntactic choices). For example, if a supporter of deep ecology were to say: “The natural resources should be conserved for their own sakes,” I would ask if “natural resources” was an appropriate label for facets of nature ([because] it denies their independence from human valuation), and whether “conserved” was an appropriate verb for what we need to do for nature, in the context of arguing for nature for its own sake. In this example there is a contradiction between the message being attempted and the message implied in the word choices. Thus, the **language** is an issue in such a statement. To be so, it **must be considered in light of** its **contexts**: the speaker and their philosophical or political position, their propositions, and the discursive communities in which they participate. The relationship between language and worldview is complex and uncertain. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis asserts the theories of linguistic determinism and relativity (Whorf, 1956). Though the strong version of this theory is not widely accepted, a weaker version is (e.g. Fowler, 1991; Lakoff, 1987). So, as Paul Chilton (1988, 47) puts it, “instead of making absolute claims about the necessary determination of all thought by all aspects of language, it is more useful to ask which parts of language influence which speakers in which contexts and to what degree.” In other words, we can say that language does not necessarily determine thought, but rather affects it; language does not set the limits of thought, but it does guide it in certain directions. This view is supported by Wendy Martyna who says of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis: “it has come to be generally accepted in its moderate version: that language may influence, rather than determine, thought and behaviour patterns” (1983, 34). **Language is the dominant medium with which ideas of nature are constructed** and maintained. Through language we encode, reinforce and legitimate categories, values, concepts, and feelings relating to the natural world. **Since words carry values, the words we choose** to name and characterize nature **are** a **significant** part of how we view it. Furthermore, **language** allows for multiple interpretations of meaning, and for ambiguities and manipulation. It also serves a powerful legitimating function and can tend to reinforce hegemonic ideologies. However, it is also a creative resource and **provides opportunities for change** and transformation. **Language, thought,** feeling, **and worldview are** then **mutually shaping dimensions of** an ongoing process of perception, conceptualization, **representation**, construction, legitimation, reproduction, and sometimes transformation of ideologies. There is no such thing as neutral language (See Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Connolly, 1983; Fairclough, 1989; Hall, 1980; Spender, 1985; and Williams, 1983). The feature of language that most influences our views of nature is metaphor. Since metaphors have been widely theorized (See for example, Black, 1979; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Ortony, 1979; and Sacks, 1979), and since I have explored their environmental significance elsewhere (Meisner, 1995), I do not feel I need to go into detail here. It is enough to say that metaphors are pervasive in our linguistic constructions of nature, and that all representations of nature draw upon them. They serve to cognitively and emotively massage our understanding of the world. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) assert, metaphors are part of thought and action as well as language. As they say, in all aspects of life,...we define our reality in terms of metaphors and then proceed to act on the basis of the metaphors. We draw inferences, set goals, make commitments, and execute plans, all on the basis of how we in part structure our experience, consciously and unconsciously, by means of metaphor. (158) In addition to thinking about metaphors, I also find the concept of linguistic registers useful for looking at issues of language and nature. A register is a variety of language that is particular to a field of use (See Cameron, 1985; and Fowler, 1991). In the case of words, we can speak of lexical registers that are associated with specific situations. As Fowler (1991, 84) suggests, lexical registers can “mark off socially and ideologically distinct areas of experience: they have a categorizing function.” So, in the case of resourcism, I think it is possible to say that there is a distinct lexical register associated with this environmental ideology. What is even more interesting, though, is the possibility that ecocentric environmental advocates are still using a resourcist register to refer to non-human nature. Furthermore, some of them--including Monte Hummel, President of WWF Canada--employ code-switching tactics to better reach their more extraction-oriented audiences (Hummel, 1991). To explore that register, I now turn to my taxonomy.

1. JAMIE BERGER, MAY 29, 2012, The Harmful Discourse of Development: A Look at India,<http://intellectualyst.com/the-harmful-discourse-of-development-a-look-at-india-534/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. William Eckhardt (Lentz Peace Research Laboratory of St. Louis). JOURNAL OF PEACE RESEARCH, February 1990, p. 15-16 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Krista Donaldson. “Why to be Wary of ‘Design for Developing Countries’.” Ambidextrous. 2008. <http://www.stanford.edu/~kmd/donaldson_wary_2008.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Mark Meisner (Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University). “Resourcist Language: The Symbolic Enslavement of Nature.” 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)